

Conditions for the media in South Sudan worsened in 2014 amid a civil war between the government of President Salva Kiir and supporters of the former vice president, Riek Machar. By the end of the year, the United Nations estimated that 1.9 million people were displaced and over 50,000 had been killed in politically motivated ethnic violence that pitted the two main tribes, Kiir's Dinka and Machar's Nuer, against each other. Due to widespread intimidation, self-censorship on sensitive topics became common among all media houses, leaving the public with limited access to independent reporting.

Legal Environment

The transitional constitution guarantees press freedom under Article 32 and calls for all levels of government to uphold this principle. There is, however, an expanding gap between law and practice, as security forces—particularly the National Security Service (NSS)—routinely harass and intimidate the press with impunity.

In September 2014, President Kiir signed into law three media bills, originally introduced in 2007, that were designed to facilitate access to information, set up a public broadcaster, and establish a press ombudsman. However, none of the laws were implemented by year's end. Furthermore, with several versions of the laws in circulation, there was confusion as to which drafts represented the final legislation. The press continued to work in a legal vacuum throughout the year.

In October, the parliament passed the controversial National Security Service Bill, further strengthening the powers of the NSS. The bill grants the agency virtually unfettered authority to arrest and detain suspects, monitor communications, conduct searches, and seize property without clear judicial oversight. Critics said it violated the constitution and was not passed with the necessary quorum. In December, Kiir declined to sign the bill without amendments, but journalists claimed that the proposed amendments were not substantive. Although it had yet to be finally adopted, officials reportedly began taking actions as if the law were in effect.

While it is relatively easy to obtain accreditation and licenses to work as a journalist, such accreditation rarely protected journalists from various abuses by security forces in 2014.

Political Environment

The sustained pressure stemming from the civil conflict during 2014 reduced South Sudan's independent media to just a handful of newspapers and broadcasters, meaning most citizens only had access to one-sided narratives from the two warring parties.

Throughout the year, security forces engaged in extrajudicial detentions, intimidation, and temporary closures of media houses to silence government critics. Such incidents occurred every month in 2014, including raids on all major media houses in the capital, Juba. Most outlets engaged in self-censorship on sensitive topics, including rebel viewpoints, criticism of the president, and threats to petroleum production.

Harassment of the press increasingly took on an ethnic component, and many Nuer journalists were driven to quit the profession and take refuge abroad or in camps for internally displaced persons. In March, the

NSS director, Major General Akol Koor, and the Information Ministry accused the independent Arabic-language daily *Al-Mijhar al-Siyasi* of false publication and supporting the opposition, allegedly citing in part the fact that several staff members were Nuer. The paper was shuttered the following month.

In two press conferences held in March and September, Information Minister Michael Makuei warned journalists that the government would view coverage of rebel activities as a form of collaboration. In August, security agents raided the influential station Bakhita Radio after it aired material from an online news report that quoted a rebel spokesman. Security officers closed the station for a month and detained news editor Ocen David for four days. In December, the government confiscated the pressrun of the private daily *Nation Mirror* simply because it carried a photograph of Machar, the rebel leader. Similarly, by year's end, security agents had raided and confiscated pressruns from the private daily *Juba Monitor* at least eight times.

Economic Environment

Government-owned South Sudan Television is the sole television station operating in the country. Journalists working at the outlet complain of self-censorship and lack of professional integrity among their superiors. Radio remains the main source of news for most citizens, with several dozen stations in operation across the country; however, many remote areas lie outside the reach of FM broadcasts.

A number of private dailies and weeklies publish regularly, though individuals within the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement own the majority of titles. Papers allied with the ruling party are favored in terms of winning advertising contracts. Print media in South Sudan are burdened with small staffs and budgets, low advertising revenue, and a national illiteracy rate of about 73 percent. Newspapers are largely concentrated in urban areas because of the high cost of transportation and a lack of reliable infrastructure. Newsprint is very expensive, and the country has only two printing presses, meaning most printing is done in Uganda or Kenya. Government seizures of pressruns caused significant fiscal losses to print outlets in 2014. The *Juba Monitor* reported losses averaging approximately \$9,500 each time its papers were confiscated.

There is a lack of reliable statistics regarding internet use in South Sudan. While the International Telecommunication Union reported a penetration rate of nearly 16 percent in 2014, other assessments put it at less than 1 percent, as most of the country lacks electricity and infrastructure. Nevertheless, several professional, critical news websites have emerged, including *Sudan Tribune*, *The Niles*, and *Gurtong*.